

District 25 News

MAKIKI, TANTALUS, MCCULLY, PAPA KOLEA

MARCH 2007



Dear Neighbors,

The Legislature has reached the midpoint of the 2007 legislative session. Of the 3,962 bills originally introduced at the start of the session, we have narrowed our focus to half of them. By the end of the session in May, we will narrow our focus even further. The daunting challenge will be to meet our communities' needs statewide in a balanced and sustainable way.

Being accessible as your Representative is an important goal for me. This monthly newsletter during the session is one communication channel I hope to maintain. I will also try to include information about governmental and other services that the public may not be fully aware of.

However, due to the high cost of mailing, I am unable to mail this newsletter to every resident in the district. One way to reduce costs is to mail this newsletter to you electronically. If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, please email me at repbelatti@capitol.hawaii.gov. Please also feel free to share this newsletter with your friends and neighbors.

In the time we have left before the Legislature adjourns, there are still opportunities to address the pressing issues in our community, including problems such as pedestrian safety and graffiti in our neighborhoods that have worsened. I welcome and encourage you to share your thoughts with me about the many issues being considered. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at 586-9425, by fax at 586-9431, or by email at repbelatti@capitol.hawaii.gov.

With warmest aloha,



Della Au Belatti

State Representative, District 25

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MARCH 2007 COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP DAY

DATE: Sat. Mar. 31st

TIME: 8 AM-12 NOON

PLACE: Makiki
District Park

Bring a friend, bring a neighbor and join us for a community clean-up. We'll be picking up trash and painting over graffiti as part of our efforts.



The Hawaii State Capitol



The House Chamber in session



The Graffiti Problem in Our District

Graffiti and vandalism are problems of special concern to our community. Makiki District Park, including Makiki Community Library, has been vandalized repeatedly. This serious problem was one inspiration for the formation of the community action group Hui O Makiki who is working to keep our community clean and safe.

The Legislature is now considering strengthening vandalism laws by making perpetrators more accountable for their actions and responsible for any cleanup. The following bills are currently moving through the House and Senate:

Relating to Criminal Property Damage (SB 676)

- Requires persons convicted of causing property damage for a second time to perform eighty hours of community service repairing graffiti damage.
- Requires persons convicted of causing property damage for a third or additional time to perform one hundred and sixty hours of community service repairing graffiti damage.

Relating to Graffiti (SB 228)

- Requires a minor convicted of causing graffiti damage, their parents, or their guardians to repair the damage and pay for the cost of paint and materials.
- Requires the convicted minor to spend eighty hours repairing graffiti damage at other properties.

Relating to Graffiti (HB 451)

- Requires those convicted of damaging property with graffiti to clean it up as a community service.
- Creates a special judicial graffiti eradication sentencing program that would ensure the property cleanup was done properly.

To ensure these bills get a hearing and are passed out of committee, contact House Judiciary Chair Tommy Waters (586-9450) and Senate Judiciary Chair Clayton Hee (586-7730) and let them know that you support these graffiti bills.

GET INVOLVED!

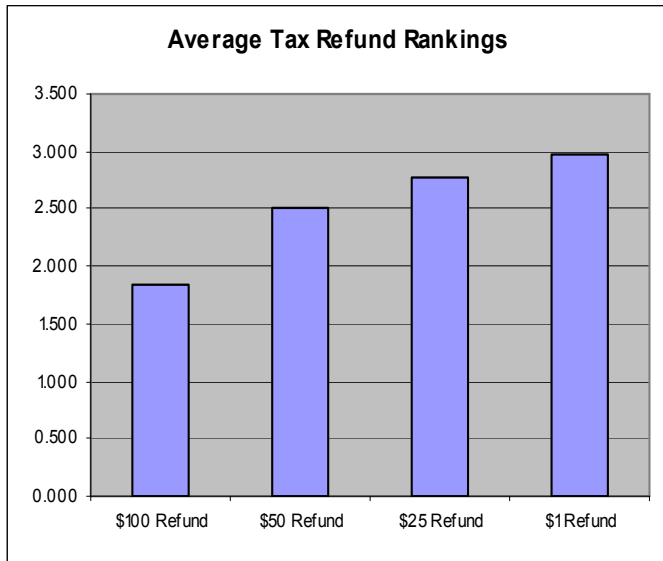
Community groups are always looking for individuals to volunteer for community projects. Call my office at 586-9425 if you have a group or project to advertise in this newsletter and please join the following groups in their efforts:

1. **March Community Clean-up Day, March 31, 8:00am–Noon.** We'll be picking up trash and painting over graffiti at Makiki District Park. Please contact my office at 586-9425 if you have any questions.
2. **Help maintain Makiki Stream and Makiki Trail by volunteering at the following clean-ups:**

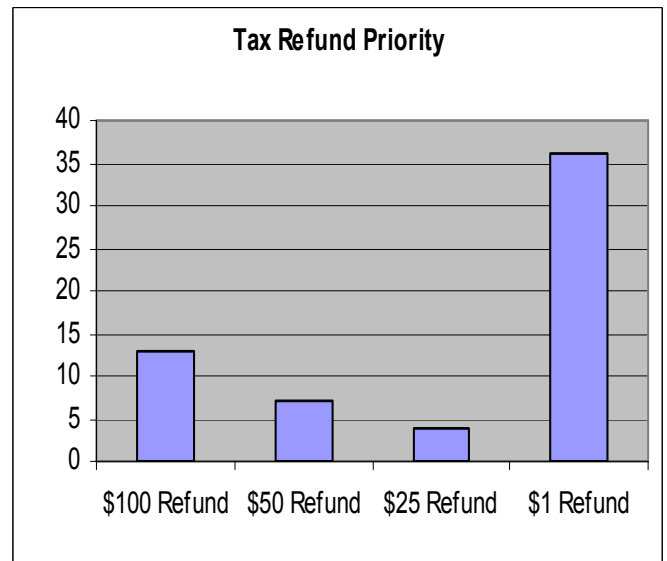
Adopt-A-Stream, Makiki Stream Stewards	Makiki Wai Trail Improvement, State DLNR
Saturday April 14, 8:30-11:00am	Saturday, April 21, 9:00am-2:00pm
Meet at S. King St. and Kalakaua Ave.	Meet at Makiki State Park.
3. **Contact Hui O Makiki at 282-2050 to see how you can volunteer to keep our community clean.**

What Your Neighbors Think

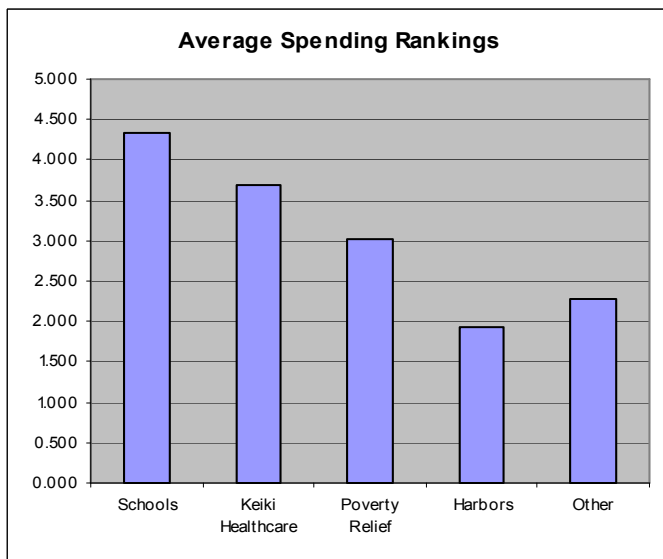
Last month I included a survey in my newsletter that asked 1800 residents of District 25 how big a tax refund they would prefer from a \$100 to \$1 refund. The Legislature must provide a tax refund or credit to taxpayers this year. For those who chose a smaller refund, I also asked what community needs areas they would rather have the money allocated to. Here are the results of the survey:



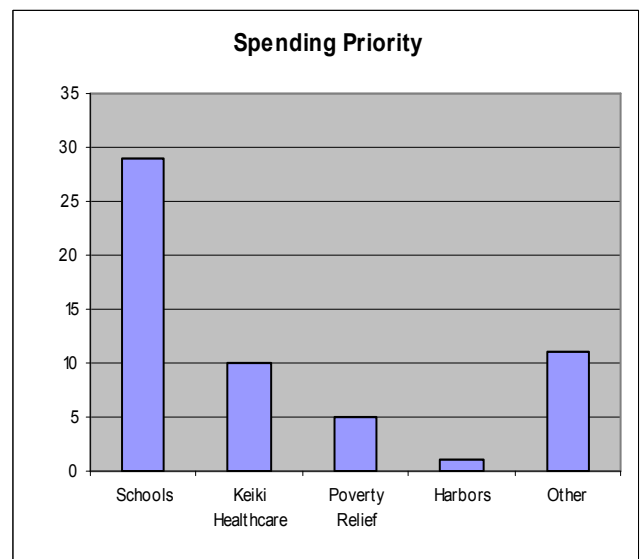
I asked neighbors to rank the tax refunds they would like to receive from most preferable to least. This is the average of those rankings. The higher the bar, the greater each tax refund was preferred. The most favored refund was \$1, and the least favored was a \$100 tax refund.



This represents each person's highest priority tax refund amount. The \$1 tax refund was by far the most popular amount.



I asked neighbors to rank those areas that the State should spend the budget surplus on from most to least desirable. The higher the bar, the greater priority given to that area of need for spending.



Similar to the graph above, this represents each person's highest priority area of need that requires State funding.

Community responses to this survey have overwhelmingly favored a \$1 refund to taxpayers. Rather than wanting a refund back for themselves, most who responded favored the State spending taxpayer money on education and school repairs, and guaranteed healthcare for all the keiki in our State.

Keeping Homes Affordable for the Next Generation



A statewide problem is the exponentially increasing price of homes out of the range of affordability for working families. One way to tackle this problem and slow the escalating price of real estate is to limit the profits from the practice of "flipping" houses. While people often buy houses and resell them within a number of months for sometimes 50% or 100% profit, this practice accelerates the rising cost of housing and reduces the supply of affordable homes on all islands.

The Legislature is considering the following bills to discourage speculation in Hawaii's real estate market by:

- Establishing an anti-speculation capital gains tax to be deposited into the Rental Housing Trust Fund (HB 1002);
- Increasing the withholding tax amount, from five percent to eight and one-quarter percent, on the disposition of real property by a non-resident seller (HB 238); and
- Increasing the conveyance tax rates on the sales of condominiums or single-family residences for which the purchaser is ineligible for a county homeowner's property tax exemption (HB 252).

"Small incentives and temporary solutions have not been working to ease the housing and rental crisis. Addressing a growing homeless population and decreasing the supply of affordable housing requires real political commitment from the Legislature."
- Della Au Belatti

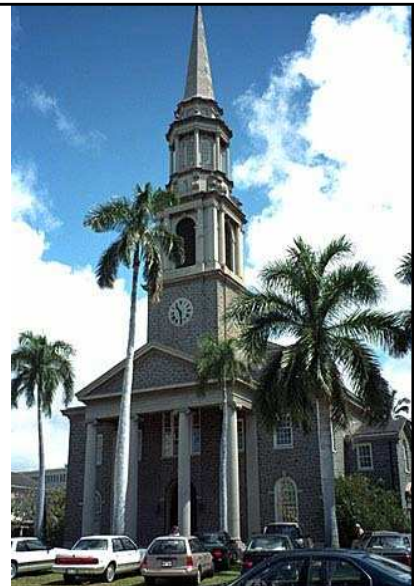
For our most vulnerable populations, the Legislature is also considering HB 150, an important measure that provides more funding for shelter and services to homeless and low-income individuals and families by:

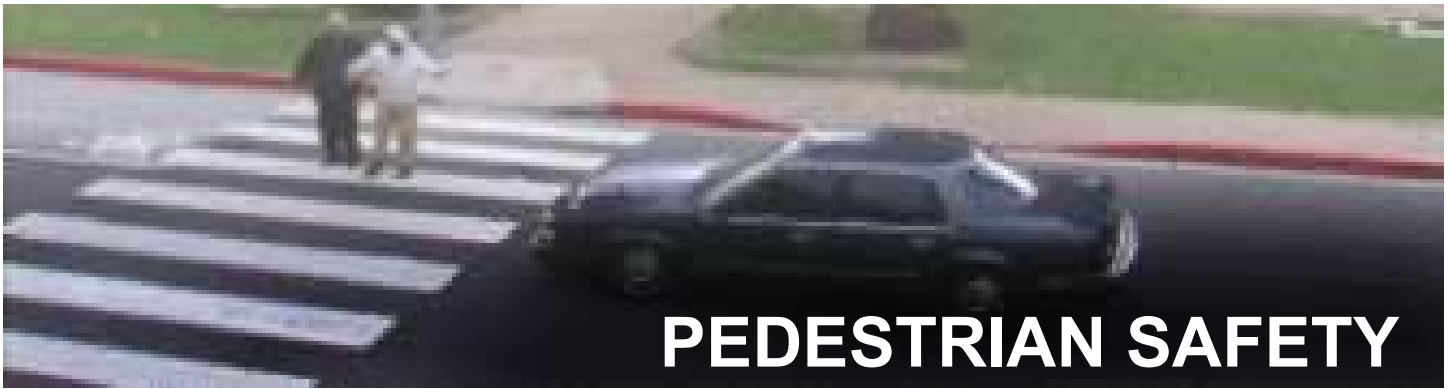
- Increasing the allocation of the conveyance tax to the Rental Housing Trust Fund;
- Appropriating funds to repair and renovate state public housing;
- Appropriating funds to provide support services at emergency and transitional shelters to the homeless; and
- Appropriating funds for outreach and supportive services to homeless individuals and families.

Get Help With Your Taxes: 2007 AARP Tax-Aide Program

It's tax season again, and April's deadlines grow closer by the day. AARP is sponsoring a Tax-Aide Program that provides free help to those with low to moderate incomes in preparing their income-tax returns. Bring last year's tax returns and any current documents you might have. Electronic filing is available on-site.

Central Union Church
1660 S. Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96826
Tuesday and Thursdays
8:30 - 11:30 AM
Contact Telephone: (808) 955-5776





PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

There is a dire need to make the roads in Makiki and the rest of Honolulu safer for our families.

Just last month noted Makiki resident, **Mrs. Lois Jeanine Reed**, a volunteer worker at homeless shelters and a pre-school teacher at local churches, was fatally struck by a vehicle at the corner of Piikoi and Beretania Streets. Our community will deeply miss her.

This year, in a period of less than three months, there have been ten pedestrian fatalities on Oahu. This compares with a total of twenty pedestrian fatalities on Oahu in all of 2006, twenty eight fatalities in 2005 and twenty four fatalities in 2004.

A large proportion of these victims were among our elderly. Shamefully, Hawaii has the highest death rate for elderly pedestrians nationwide, one hundred and sixty nine percent higher than any other state. This session, the Legislature is working on a number of bills intended to make our roads safer for pedestrians. These are a few of those ideas:

Relating to Traffic Safety (HB 357)

- Creates a two-year pilot project to test the effectiveness of new pedestrian crosswalk safety features in high risk areas on Oahu.
- Safety features to be tested include:
 - ✓ Pedestrian activated warning systems such as flashing lights embedded in the pavement, strung overhead, or mounted on poles at the ends of crosswalks;
 - ✓ Speed bumps or raised "buttons" to remind motorists to reduce their speed and warn of upcoming crosswalks;
 - ✓ Reflective raised crosswalk markings on the edge of crosswalks closest to oncoming traffic; and
 - ✓ Improved pedestrian-crossing signage.

Relating to Pedestrian Safety (HB 806)

- Addresses the concern that elderly pedestrians, age sixty five and older, suffer the highest number of pedestrian fatalities because traffic lights with electronic crossing signs do not provide sufficient time for many of our elderly to safely get out of the line of traffic.
- Proposes a pilot study to evaluate the impact that lengthening pedestrian walk times will have on traffic volume and congestion, along with remedies to alleviate adverse effects of lengthened walk times.
- Requires the department of transportation to submit an interim report, including proposed legislation, in 2008 and provide its final report in 2009.

Relating to Pedestrian's Right of Way (HB 375)

- Holds both motorists and pedestrians accountable for safety by creating a system of fines for violations of basic pedestrian/motorist road safety rules.
- Mandates fines based on successive convictions for motorists who violate a pedestrians' right of way at a marked crosswalk or at an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection.
- Mandates fines based on successive convictions for pedestrians who illegally cross a roadway outside of a marked crosswalk or at an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection.

Relating to Highway Safety (SB 830)

- Creates a three-year pilot program using "photo red light imaging detectors" located at selected intersections. These detectors are high tech cameras that take pictures of license plates and positions of vehicles as they drive through red lights at intersections.
- Requires signs that notify drivers of the camera's presence.
- Authorizes fines against violators, with fines being deposited into a general fund account established for the creation, operation, management, and maintenance of the camera systems.

2007 Neighborhood Board Elections

Our Neighborhood Board is a forum for citizen participation so that the City and State governments can properly serve and advance the aspirations of all citizens. Through the Neighborhood Board system, every individual has the opportunity to participate in government decision making which affects his or her community. Each year, members of the community volunteer their time to serve on the Board, but it is up to all of us to decide who will represent us.

This year's Neighborhood Board elections are almost here. In an effort to increase community participation, online voting has been introduced as an alternative method of voting.

On March 23, paper ballots and candidate profiles will be mailed to all registered voters in neighborhoods with contested races. Included with each paper ballot will be a "voter number" that will enable a voter to vote online if so desired.

You can now access the online voting website at: www.nbvote.com. Candidate profiles can be viewed by going to: www.honolulu.gov/nco/.

Just remember, the deadline for voting is April 16, 2007. For more information please call the Neighborhood Commission Office (NCO) at 527-5749 or visit the NCO website at www.honolulu.gov/nco/.

Sunshine Legislation

This session, the Legislature is considering bills that make changes to Hawaii's "open meetings" Sunshine Law. This law governs how all state and county boards conduct their business. The intent of the law is to provide citizens with access to public meetings and encourage participation in government.

However, restrictive provisions in the law make it hard for neighborhood boards to conduct their business as effectively as possible. In response to this, the Legislature has introduced bills that amend the Sunshine Law to allow boards the flexibility to operate openly for the public good.

House Bill 1512, seeking to amend the Sunshine Law, remains alive in the legislative process. This bill allows neighborhood boards to function more effectively by:

- Allowing board members to receive public input on issues that have not been scheduled on the meeting agenda notice;
- Allowing board members to receive information and testimony even without a quorum (a majority of members required to conduct business legally) provided no decision is made based on discussion at the time;



- Permitting two or more board members but less than a quorum, to attend informational meetings or seminars provided that the presentation is not exclusively for the members of the board; and
- Permitting the neighborhood board to take action on an unanticipated event that occurs after a public notice of a neighborhood board but before the scheduled meeting if it is in the public interest concerning public health, safety or welfare.

These amendments to the current Sunshine Law are necessary to remove current restrictions that limit neighborhood boards' abilities to conduct their meetings. Without these restrictions, neighborhood boards will be able to better serve the communities they represent.